DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 026 323 24 SP 002 172

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Appendix R. A Basic Communication Skill for Improving Interpersonal Relationships.

Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, Oreg.
Spons Agency-Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Research.
Bureau No-BR-8-9022
Pub Date Oct 68
Contract-OEC-0-8-089022(010)
Note-13p.; Appendix R in A Competency Based, Field Centered, Systems Approach to Elementary Teacher Education; Final Report. Vol. III, p135-148.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.75
Descriptors-*Communication Skills, *Interpersonal Relationship, *Laboratory Training, *Training Techniques
Identifiers-*ComField Model Teacher Education Program

This appendix contains descriptions of three exercises designed to develop basic communications skills for improving interpersonal relations. Each exercise--designed to be engaged in by teachers in dyads, triads, quadruples, or similar groups without the presence of a skilled leader--includes a statement of the problem, description of the skill and skill-development techniques with illustrative examples, and questions useful for practicing verbal and nonverbal communication of feelings. This document and SP 002 155-SP 002 180 comprise the appendixes for the ComField Model Teacher Education Program Specifications in SP 002 154. (JS)

ED026323

APPENDIX R--A BASIC COMMUNICATION SKILL FOR IMPROVING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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SP002172

A BASIC COMMUNICATION SKILL
FOR IMPROVING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

John Wallen has developed a series of experiences that can be engaged in by teachers in dyads, triads, quadruples, or similar groups. These experiences are designed so that the presence of a skilled leader is not necessary in order for teachers to benefit from the experiences. The three exercises included in the attachment are representative of a variety of skilled exercises that are in the process of being developed at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

A BASIC COMMUNICATION SKILL
FOR IMPROVING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

John L. Wallen, Ph.D.

Behavior Description

THE PROBLEM

If you and another person are to discuss the way you work together or what is happening in your relationship, both of you must be able to talk about what each of you does that affects the other. This is not easy. Most of us have trouble describing another's behavior clearly enough that he can understand what actions of his we have in mind.

Instead of describing the other person's behavior we usually discuss his attitudes, his motivations, his traits and personality characteristics. Often our statements are more expressive of the way we feel about the other's actions than they are informing about his behavior. And yet we may be unaware of our feelings at the time.

Let's suppose you tell me that I am rude (a trait) or that I don't care about your opinion (my motivation). Because I am not trying to be rude and because I feel that I do care about your opinion, I don't understand what you are trying to communicate. We certainly have not moved closer to a shared understanding. However, if you point out that several times in the past few minutes I have interrupted you and have overridden you before you could finish what you were saying, I receive a clearer picture of what actions of mine were affecting you.

THE SKILL

Behavior description means reporting specific, observable actions of others (1) without placing a value on them as right or wrong, bad or good; (2) without making accusations or generalizations about the other's motives, attitudes, or personality traits.

You try to let others know what behavior you are responding to by describing it clearly enough and specifically enough that others know what you observed. To do this you must describe visible evidence--actions that are open to anybody's observation.

Sometimes, for practice, it is helpful to try beginning your description with, "I see that..." or "I noticed that..." or "I heard you say...," to remind yourself that you are trying to describe specific actions.

Examples: "Jim, you've talked more than others on this topic. Several times you cut others off before they had finished."

NOT: "Jim, you're too rude!" which names a trait and gives no evidence.

NOT: "Jim, you always want to hog the center of attention!" which imputes an undesirable motive or intention.

"Bob, you've taken the opposite of nearly everything Harry has suggested today."

NOT: "Bob, you're just trying to show Harry up." which is an accusation of undesirable motivation.

NOT: "Bob, you're being stubborn." which is name calling.

"Sam, you cut in before I had finished."

NOT: "Sam, you deliberately didn't let me finish." The word "deliberately" implies that Sam knowingly and intentionally cut you off. All that anybody can observe is that he did cut in before you had finished.

Several members of the group had told Ben that he was too arrogant. Ben was confused and puzzled by this judgment. He was confused because he didn't know what to do about it; he didn't know what it referred to. He was puzzled because he didn't <u>feel</u> arrogant or scornful of the others. In fact, he admitted that he really felt nervous and unsure of himself. Finally, Joe commented that Ben often laughed explosively after Ben made a comment that seemed to have no humerous aspects. Ben said he had been unaware of this. Others immediately recognized that this was the behavior that made them perceive Ben as looking down on them and, therefore, arrogant. The pattern, thus, was as follows: When he made a statement of which he was somewhat unsure, Ben felt insecure ---- Ben's feelings of insecurity expressed themselves in an explosive

laugh after Ben made the statement ---- the other person perceived Ben as laughing at him ---- the other person felt put down and humiliated ---- the other expressed his feeling of humiliation by calling Ben arrogant. Note that Ben had no awareness of his own behavior which was being misread until Joe accurately described what Ben was doing. Ben could then see that his laugh was a way of attempting to cope with his own feelings of insecurity.

To develop skill in describing behavior you must sharpen your observation of what actually did occur. You must force yourself to pay attention to what is observable and to hold inferences in abeyance. As you practice this you may find that many of your conclusions about others are based less on observable evidence than on your own feelings of affection, insecurity, irritation, jealousy, or fear. For example, accusations that attribute undesirable motives to another are usually expressions of the speaker's negative feelings toward the other and not descriptions at all.

Description of Feelings

THE PROBLEM

To communicate your own feelings accurately or to understand those of others is difficult.

First, expressions of emotion take many different forms. Feelings can express themselves in bodily changes, in action, and in words. (See attached diagram.)

Second, any specific expression of feeling may come from very different feelings. A blush, for example, may indicate that the person is feeling pleased; but it may also indicate that he feels annoyed, or embarrassed, or uneasy.

Likewise, a specific feeling does not always get expressed in the same way. For example, a child's feeling of affection for his teacher may lead him to blush when she stands near his desk, to touch her as he passes her, to watch her as she walks around the room, to tell her, "You're nice," to bring his pet turtle to show her, etc.--different forms of expression for the child's feeling of affection.

Communication of feelings, thus, is often inaccurate or even misleading. What looks like an expression of anger, for example, often turns out to result from hurt feelings or from fear.

A further obstacle to the accurate communication of feelings is that your perception of what another is feeling is based on so many different kinds of information. When somebody speaks, you notice more than just the words he says. You note his gestures, voice tone, posture, facial expression, etc. In addition, you are aware of the immediate present situation--the context in which the interaction is occurring. You are aware of whether somebody is watching, for example. And so you make assumptions about how the situation influences what the other is feeling. Beyond all of this you also have expectations based on your past experiences with the other.

You make inferences from all of this information--his words, nonverbal cues, the situational context, your expectations of the other. These inferences are influenced by your own current emotional state. What you perceive the other to be feeling, then, often depends more upon what you are feeling (e.g., to be afraid of or wishing for) than upon the other person's actions or words.

For example, if you are feeling guilty about something, you may perceive others as angry with you. If you are feeling depressed and discouraged about yourself, others may seem to be expressing disapproval of you.

And so--communicating your own and understanding the feelings of others is an extremely difficult task. And yet, if you wish others to respond to you as a person, you must help them understand how you feel. Likewise, if you are concerned about the other as a person and about your relationship with him, you must try to understand his emotional reactions.

THE SKILL

Although we usually try to describe our ideas clearly and accurately, we often do not try to describe our feelings clearly. Feelings get expressed in many different ways, but we do not usually attempt to identify the feeling itself.

One way to describe a feeling is to identify or name it. "I feel angry." "I feel embarrassed." "I feel comfortable with you." However, we do not have enough names or labels to encompass the broad range of human emotions, and so we invent other ways to describe our feelings, such as the use of similes. "I feel like a tiny frog in a huge pond." A girl, whose friendly overture had just been rebuffed, said, "I feel like I have just had an arm amputated."

A third way to describe a feeling is to report what kind of action the feeling urges you to do. "I feel like hugging and hugging you." "I'd like to slap you." "I wish I could walk off and leave you."

In addition, many figures of speech serve as descriptions of feeling. "I just swallowed a bushel of spring sunshine."

DESCRIBING YOUR OWN FEELINGS

You try to make clear what feelings you are experiencing by identifying them. The statement must (1) refer to "I," "me," or "my," and (2) specify some kind of feeling by name, simile, action urge, or other figure of speech.

The following examples show the relation between two kinds of expressions of feeling: (1) those that describe what the speaker

is feeling, and (2) those that do not. Notice that expressions of feeling which describe the speaker's emotional state are more precise, less capable of misinterpretation and, thus, convey more accurately what feelings are affecting the speaker.

Expressing feeling by describing your emotional state	Expressing feeling without describing your emotional state
"I feel embarrassed." "I feel pleased." "I feel annoyed."	Blushing and saying nothing.
"I feel angry!" "I'm worried about this." "I feel hurt by what you said."	Suddenly becoming silent in the midst of a conversation.
"I enjoy her sense of humor." "I respect her abilities and competence." "I love her but I feel I shouldn't say so."	"She's a wonderful person."
"I hurt too much to hear any more." "I feel angry at myself." "I'm angry with you."	"Shut up!!!"

Because emotional states express themselves simultaneously in words, in actions, and in physiological changes, a person may convey contradictory messages about what he is feeling. For example, his actions (a smile or laugh) may contradict his words (that he is angry). The clearest emotional communication occurs when the speaker's description of what he is feeling matches and, thus, amplifies what is being conveyed by his actions and other nonverbal expressions of feeling.

The aim in describing your own feelings is to start a dialogue that will improve your relationship with the other. After all, others need to know how you feel if they are to take your feelings into account. Negative feelings are indicator signals that something may be going wrong in a relationship with another person. To ignore negative feelings is like ignoring a warning light that indicates that an electrical circuit is overloaded. Negative feelings are a signal that the two of you need to check for misunderstanding and faulty communication.

After discussing how each of you sees the situation or your relationship, you may discover that your feelings resulted from false perceptions of the situation and of his motives. In this case, your feelings would probably change. However, the other may discover that his actions are arousing feelings in you that he wasn't aware of--feelings that others beside you might experience in response to his behavior--and he may change.

In short, describing your feelings should not be an effort to coerce the other into changing so that you won't feel as you do. Rather you report your inner state as just one more piece of information that is necessary if the two of you are to understand and improve your relationship.

PERCEPTION CHECK

You describe what you perceive to be the other's inner state in order to check whether you do understand what he feels. That is, you test to see whether you have decoded his expressions of feeling accurately. You transform his expressions of feeling into a tentative description of his feeling. A good perception check conveys this message, "I want to understand your feelings--is this (making a description of his feelings) the way you feel?"

Examples:

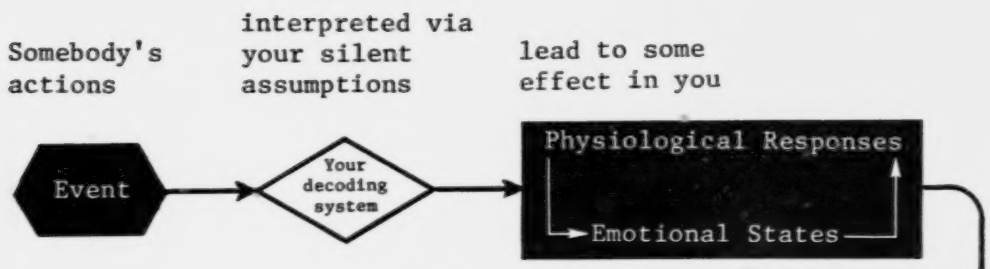
"I get the impression you are angry with me. Are you?"
(NOT: "Why are you so angry with me?" This is mind reading, not perception checking.)

"Am I right that you feel disappointed that nobody commented on your suggestion?"

"I'm not sure whether your expression means that my comment hurt your feelings, irritated you, or confused you."

Note that a perception check (1) describes the other's feelings, and (2) does not express disapproval or approval. It merely conveys, "This is how I understand your feelings. Am I accurate?"

HOW YOUR EMOTIONAL STATES EXPRESS THEMSELVES



Even when you are unaware of your feelings, your emotional state may express itself in these ways.

Physiological Expression: heart rate, breathing, blushing, sweating, weeping, trembling, ...

Expression in Actions: hugging, smiling, hitting, looking at or away, slouching, biting lips, ...

Expression in Words:

- COMMANDS: "Shut up!"
- QUESTIONS: "Is it safe to drive this fast?"
- ACCUSATIONS: "You don't care about me."
- NAME-CALLING: "You're rude."
- SARCASM: "You certainly make a person feel appreciated!"
- JUDGEMENTS:
  - Approval: "You're wonderful!"
  - Disapproval: "You talk too much."

You can describe your feelings only when you are aware of what they are.

DESCRIPTIONS OF FEELING:

- "I hurt too much to hear any more."
- "I'm afraid going this fast."
- "It hurt my feelings when you forgot my birthday."
- "I felt put down when you ignored my comment."
- "I resent it that you don't seem to appreciate what I did for you."
- "I really enjoy your sense of humor."
- "I'm getting bored and beginning to tune out."

John L. Wallen, 1968/Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Exercises in Communication of Feelings

COMMUNICATION BY WORDS

Any spoken statement can convey feelings. Even the factual report, "It's three p.m.," can be said in such a way that it expresses anger or disappointment. However, the words do not convey the feelings; the speaker's nonverbal actions do. His voice tone, emphasis, gestures, facial expression convey anger or disappointment.

The content of some sentences, however, express as feelings even when you cannot see or hear the speaker. In such cases the topic or the wording itself reveal that feelings are present in the speaker.

In each set below, all the sentences convey feeling, i.e., any of them could have been spoken by the same person in the same situation.

Each set, however, contains two different ways of communicating feelings by words--two different kinds of verbal expressions of feelings.

1. The sentence conveys feeling <u>by describing specifically what the speaker is feeling</u>. (Examples: "I am <u>disappointed</u>." "I feel <u>left out</u>." "I <u>like</u> you.") The emotional state of the speaker is the topic or content of the sentence. The speaker's feeling is identified by some word or phrase such as "disappointed," "left out," "like," i.e., the speaker's feeling is described.

2. The sentence conveys feelings but <u>does not describe what the speaker feels</u>. (Examples: "Oh, Heck!" "Get out!" "I thought you'd never get here.") Strong feeling obviously is behind each of the examples, but the statement does not describe the feeling itself. We may feel sure what the feeling is, but the statement does not identify it.

Put a D before each sentence below that conveys feeling by describing the speaker's emotional state.

Put a No before each sentence that conveys feeling but does not describe or identify the speaker's emotional state.

1. (___) a. Shut up! Not another word out of you!
   (___) b. I'm really annoyed by what you just said.

2. (___) a. Can't you see I'm busy? Get out!
   (___) b. I'm beginning to resent your constant interruptions.
   (___) c. You have no consideration for anybody else's feelings. You're completely selfish.

3. (___) a. I feel discouraged because of some things that happened today.
   (___) b. This has been an upsetting day.

4. (___) a. You're a wonderful person.
   (___) b. I really like you.

5. (___) a. I feel comfortable and free to be myself when I'm around you.
   (___) b. We all feel you're a wonderful person.
   (___) c. Everybody likes you.

6. (___) a. If things don't improve around here, I'll look for a new job.
   (___) b. Did you ever hear of such a lousy outfit as this is?
   (___) c. I'm afraid to admit that I need help with my work.

7. (___) a. This is a very poor exercise.
   (___) b. I feel this is a very poor exercise.
   (___) c. I'm confused, frustrated, and annoyed by this exercise.

8. (___) a. I feel inadequate when teaching that particular subject.
   (___) b. I am inadequate in teaching that particular subject.

9. (___) a. I am a failure--I'll never amount to anything.
   (___) b. That teacher is awful. He didn't teach me anything.
   (___) c. I'm depressed and discouraged because I did so poorly on that test.

10. (___) a. I feel lonely and isolated in my group.
    (___) b. For all the attention anybody pays to me I might as well not be in my group!
    (___) c. I feel that nobody in my group cares whether I am there or not.

COMMUNICATION WITHOUT WORDS

Each situation below points out a nonverbal expression of feelings. For each situation you are to describe two different feelings (within the person named) that might have given rise to such a nonverbal expression of feelings.

11. In a group, Betty who had been talking a lot suddenly became silent. Describe two different feelings that might have led Betty to become silent.

    1)

    2)

12. In a group, Jane abruptly changed the subject without explanation. Describe two different feelings that might have led Jane to change the subject.

    1)

    2)

13. Every time Jerry made a comment in the group, he kept his eyes focused on the leader's face. Describe two different feelings that might have led Jerry to watch the leader so intently.

    1)

    2)

14. As the group discussion continued, Mary became more and more tense and restless. Finally, she got up abruptly, saying nothing, and left the room. Describe two different feelings that might have led Mary to leave.

    1)

    2)

HOW DO YOU EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS?

On the next page are some feelings you may have experienced. For each of these you are to report two different ways that you express such feelings.

The first answer should be something you would say that would express but not describe your feelings.

The second answer should report how you might express such feelings by actions without using words.

15. When you feel bored with what is going on in a group, how does your feeling usually express itself?

    In words?

    Without words?

16. When you feel very annoyed with another person, but reluctant to say so openly, how does your feeling usually express itself?

    In words?

    Without words?

17. When another person says or does something to you that deeply hurts your feelings, how does your feeling usually express itself?

    In words?

    Without words?

18. Another person asks you to do something that you are afraid you cannot do very well. You also do not wish him to know that you feel inadequate. How do your feelings express themselves?

    In words?

    Without words?

19. When you feel fondness and affection for another person and at the same time are not sure that the other feels the same toward you, how does your feeling usually express itself?

    In words?

    Without words?